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COMISSÃO PARA OS DIREITOS
DO POVO MAUBERE

Your Excellency
The Minister of Foreign Affairs
Dr. Wolfgang Schussel

7 November 1997

Your Excellency,

As a non-governmental organisation working exclusively on the question of East Timor ever since 1981, the Commission for the Rights of the Maubere People (CDPM) has closely monitored the general situation of intense oppression in which the people of the territory have been forced to live, and has followed the cases of Timorese seeking refugee in Embassies - similar to those who are presently in the Austrian Embassy in Jakarta.

In our view, any State that is guided by the principals of International Law and respect for human rights would consider the Indonesian Government's demand that the refugees be handed over to Indonesian authorities to be totally unacceptable. The claims that some of the refugees are "terrorists" are not only totally groundless, but reveal the utmost cynicism on the part of the Indonesian authorities.

What right does a regime have to make such accusations, when it continues to inflict State terrorism upon he Timorese people as a matter of routine, and has slaughtered one third of the original population in the process? The Timorese, however, as inhabitants of a non-autonomous territory illegally occupied by a foreign power, do have a right - the right to resist, which is enshrined in the UN Charter itself.

In the past, when refugees have had to leave an Embassy after being denied asylum, they were immediately taken to police custody for "investigation" and, in almost all cases, subsequently brutally tortured. There is strong evidence to suggest that the other Timorese, arrested in Dili and Semarang on suspicion of having links with the asylum-seekers, have been subjected to torture. There have even been statements issued publicly by the Indonesian authorities referring to the possibility of the death penalty being applied to those arrested. Under the circumstances, therefor, a decision by the Austrian authorities to hand over the refugees now in the Embassy in Jakarta could be tantamount to a death sentence.

We are hopeful that a country like Austria, which has had firsthand experience of the horrors of foreign occupation, and from which thousands of its citizens were forced to escape into exile - including to Portugal - will appreciate the plight of the Avelino Coelho da Silva family and their companions, and will be prepared to stand up to the blackmail of a dictatorial regime such as that of Indonesia.

We remain,
Yours faithfully,

for the CDPM

(António Pinto Pereira)

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